Ethical lessons from the open source community

2019

1 min read • 268 words

Themes: Programming   Spiritual

Since ~2011, I've focused the majority of my time on open source software. Only sometimes, lately, do I take a moment to sit back and reflect on lessons learned (often the hard way).

This is always a useful exercise, as I view the open source software community as at the fore-front of many social inventions; we're effectively, in my opinion, the best self-organized, distributed force on Earth. I'm sure, in my ignorance, other groups hold themselves in similar regard. But, it is a fruitful exercise, nonetheless, to view our community this way.

Much in the spirit of The Hacker's Manifesto, I am sharing here a concise, inconclusive list of moral principles that I have extracted from my collective experiences in the open source community—insights that later informed deeper understanding of programming as spiritual practice.

Approach all others with respectfulness.

Be cordial or be on your way.

Never expect anything, in return.

Others may not have the bandwidth to process the valuable information you're offering, or inquiring about. Never expect anyone to even answer your question or respond to your ticket.

∴ Be thankful, when it does happen.

Access to information (e.g. documentation) allows our efforts to scale, more so than any other factor.

I gave a talk about this.

The needs of the collective are (usually)more important than the needs of yourself.

The exception makes the rule.

Sustainability via collective interest.

Your project might "die" one day, fading away into nothingness, if no one else is interested.
The world may move on from the trend that is making your library popular.

All software is transient.

Entropy is good.